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## Obeying Is Knowing

### John 7:14-18

**Intro:** At the beginning of **ch7** we are introduced to the idea that the life of Jesus operated according to a divine time-table. The decisions He made and the actions He took corresponded precisely to the plan that the Father had laid out for His life, ministry and sacrificial death. Each one of these aspects contributed directly to what we know as God's plan of salvation for fallen humanity. Even before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God had laid out a plan for the complete atonement for sin and redemption of sinners, a plan that would provide forgiveness of sin, justification for sinners, righteousness for the unrighteous and eternal salvation for those who were doomed to hell.

But, as we have seen, Jesus was not only aware of the Father's timetable for His life, He also appeared to be tune in to the specific details of this timetable. His brothers challenged Him to go up to Jerusalem and reveal Himself to the people in all His power and majesty. Jesus refused to go up To Jerusalem publicly but He eventually did go up, but in a more private, discreet manner. Ultimately Jesus would enter Jerusalem in a very public way to much fanfare from the common folk and much to the discomfort of the religious leaders. But, how did Jesus know this? Why was He so confident in the fulfillment of the Father's plan? It requires a certain measure of spiritual discernment to know both God's will and God's timing but I don't believe Jesus possessed this merely because He was God. Our text today will reveal the secret of spiritual discernment and how each of God's children can possess it for themselves.

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**14-15-** Jesus waited until halfway through the feast before going up to the temple to teach. No reason is given for this particular decision in timing. We can only assume that He waited to teach at the high point of the festivities and didn't want to be involved in the entire celebration. Notice though, that there was no attempt by Him to hide or teach in secret. He went up to the temple to teach and that was about as public an activity as was possible for anyone in that environment to engage in. As usual, Jesus taught boldly. He never shrank back from proclaiming the truth.

No comment is made as to the content of His teaching here. Regardless, it wasn't the content of His teaching but the style of it that caused such a stir. As the people listened to His teaching, they were amazed; especially the temple authorities and religious leaders. His mastery of Scripture and His power of persuasive exposition were undeniable, and yet he had not been trained in any of the great rabbinical schools of the day. They wouldn't have really been surprised at His knowing a little Scripture. It was regularly read in the synagogue and the Shema ([Deut 6:4-5](#)) was memorized by all. Their surprise would be at how Jesus was able to carry on a lengthy discourse in the manner of the rabbis and the amount of Scripture He could quote.

**this Man**- The phrase is used of Jesus in a contemptuous way; as if saying "this uneducated fellow." Of course, Jesus is the Incarnate Logos, the Living Word of God and it is highly ironic and clearly short-sighted that the Jews are treating him as an uneducated fellow. If they could have condemned Jesus on some false doctrine or wrong understanding of Scripture, they certainly would have. Since they couldn't do that, they attack His credentials. Upon hearing His teaching and being amazed by it no less, the only response they could come up with is, "Where did He study?" as if that was all that mattered.

Sadly, there churches today that wouldn't allow Jesus in their pulpits because He didn't graduate from their seminaries; He didn't have a diploma; He's not part of their denomination (or non-denomination). That shouldn't be the only criteria in spiritual matters. The real criterion is seen in [Acts 4:13](#) – "they had been with Jesus..." Of course, even in this assessment, the religious leaders were still wrong. The disciple's boldness in preaching and power to heal was not because they had been with Jesus but because they still were with Jesus! That's why the crowds were amazed by them; that's why the religious leaders marveled at these uneducated and ignorant men as they stood boldly before them; not because they had been with Jesus but because they still were with Jesus. That's the real criterion for any spiritual success in the Christian life – spending time with Jesus regularly.

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**16**- Not only were they attacking His credentials in [vs15](#), they were also questioning His authority to teach. "If you didn't study in the temple precincts, if you didn't sit at the feet of any of our notable rabbis, from where do you derive your authority to teach the Scriptures?" The rabbis of Jesus' day taught by quoting other rabbis; mainly those who'd lived before them.

The Jewish Talmud is composed mostly of such rabbinic quotations. Jesus didn't teach this way. He didn't defer to any of the great rabbis who came before Him. This didn't sit well with the religious establishment.

Now, if we had been in this situation, we might've been inclined to stress our own originality, which Jesus certainly could have done. But, if He had done that; if He had claimed to be self-taught or that He needed no teacher, He would have been instantly discredited because nobody in His day prized originality. Jesus doesn't do that. Instead, when He is questioned about His authority He replied, not by denying the need for external authority but by citing the highest authority of all. "My doctrine is not Mine (My own)," he said. "but His who sent me." The tradition out of which Jesus spoke and taught was God the Father's.

All the OT prophets, as the spokesmen of God, delivered a message that was not their own, but God's. So it was with Jesus, the greatest prophet of all, who came to declare the Father. Just as the works that He did were those that the Father had given Him to do (5:36) so too, the words that He spoke were those which the Father had given Him to speak. The only difference between OT prophets and Jesus is that the OT prophets always prefaced their messages with, "Thus says the Lord..." whereas Jesus, exercising the authority given to Him by the Father, could say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you..." His doctrine came from the Father so He could rightly claim absolute authority for everything that He taught! But, doesn't every religious teacher make a similar claim? How, then, can we know that Jesus is teaching the truth?

**17-** How do we confirm that Jesus is teaching us the truth? By obeying what He tells us to do! God's Word proves itself true to those who will sincerely do it. Is this just something that is promised to the theologically inclined among us? Not at all! Let's look at exactly what Jesus says here: If (possibility) anyone (everyone – same boat) wills to do (will do – obey) His will, he shall know (confirmation) concerning the doctrine... whether it is really from God or if it's just been manufactured in Nazareth (traditions of men). Anyone whose whole will is bent and set in obeying God's will is going to have the spiritual discernment required to know the validity of the course of their life but the next step.

This means more than just making a moral determination, more than just

deciding to be good from now on. This involves faith! On the surface, there seems to be a big difference between understanding Jesus' teachings and obeying them. Some might even try to make a distinction between believing His teachings and obeying them. But there really is no distinction between them at all. If you're not willing to obey Jesus' teachings then you really can't say that you truly understand them and you certainly can't say with any honesty that you actually believe them. Obedience is the only response for understanding and believing the doctrine (teachings) of Jesus. In fact, it's the only logical response to loving Jesus (14:15). This explains why the Jewish leaders didn't understand His teachings: they had stubborn wills and refused to submit to Him.

This reveals a value spiritual principle for every believer today: obedience is relative to spiritual light and spiritual growth. Doing the Lord's will (obeying the commands and principles laid out for us in scripture) is critical to knowing (or proving) the validity of it. We learned in a previous lesson the spiritual principle that believing is seeing. Now we also see that obeying is proving. Rebellion leads to spiritual darkness but obedience leads to spiritual light. If God is revealing His will to you (and He is constantly through His word) and you rebel against it, it creates a darkness or a confusion in your life. If, on the other hand, you trust His word, yield to it and make the mental decision to obey it – it will produce both spiritual light and spiritual growth and who wouldn't want more of that in their life?

That's what this verse is talking about: If anyone – this means everyone is included in this possibility! Anyone can enjoy the blessing of spiritual assurance and clarity through the vehicle of obedience. Jesus' whole desire is that those who hear what He has to say should glorify God by believing His doctrine and obeying His teaching since it is the Father who has commissioned Him to deliver the message. In vs15, Jesus' hearers had raised the question of His competence as a teacher but here in vs17, Jesus now raises the question of their competence as hearers.

How about you? Can you hear what Jesus is saying? I don't mean hear with your ears but with your heart. If you only hear with your ears then His words will have no effect on you. But, if you are able to hear His words with your heart then you will begin to understand them, accept them and ultimately, obey them. That is the evidence of a competent hearer. The problem today is that we have way too many talkers and very few real listeners. Everyone

wants to explain their position, defend it, justify it with a multitude of words but it doesn't really matter how much they talk because they don't actually have anything valid to say. Rejecting God's will is an indefensible position – it's not logical or rational. Read through Numbers and watch how many times Israel questions God's power or doubts His ability to provide for them – it's incredible, even ludicrous but it's just like people today who think they can do better job of ordering their own life – it's simply ridiculous: worthy of ridicule.

Now, I've heard people excuse their godless lifestyle by saying, "I've tried church. It didn't work for me." Is that what Jesus is suggesting here, a pragmatic test for divine truth? "Try it! If it works, it must be true!" Of course not; because then He would also be suggesting that if it doesn't work, then it must be false! That kind of test would lead to a lot of confusion because any cult follower could say, "I've tried what the cult teaches and it works!" (and many do).

No, Jesus' statement goes much deeper. He's not suggesting a shallow taste test but a deep personal commitment to the truth. The Jews depended on education and authorities and received their doctrine secondhand but Jesus insists that we should experience the authority of truth personally. The Jewish leaders were trying to kill Jesus all the while claiming to understand God's truth and obey it. This proves that an enlightened and educated mind is no guarantee of a pure heart or a sanctified will. Some of the world's worst criminals are highly intelligent and well educated people. There must be more than an intellectual acknowledgement of truth – there must be a commitment!

If there is a full commitment then knowledge will follow. Satan offered Adam and Eve knowledge but it was knowledge based on disobedience which led to sin and then death. Jesus offers spiritual knowledge as the result of obedience: 1<sup>st</sup> the yoke of personal responsibility and then the joy of knowing God's truth.

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**18-** Jesus assures the Jews that they can verify His statement from their very own observations. Anyone that brings a message originating from their own resources is only looking to advance themselves and their agenda. They can do nothing else! But the messenger who is only concerned with the interests of the One who sent Him is different. The One who seeks the



glory of God is true. Jesus doesn't say that He speaks the truth but that He is true. Because He is true, there is thus no unrighteousness to be found in Him. This sets Him in direct contrast with the Jews who were listening to Him, in whom there was most certainly unrighteousness.

In this verse, Jesus gives us two measures of a true teacher: 1) Does the teaching come from God? That is: is it according to the revealed Word of God or does it generate from the resources of men? 2) Does the work give glory to God? Not just the teaching itself but the results of the teaching. Does the leadership take credit for their success or do they refer all inquiries to the grace, mercy and provision of a loving heavenly Father. Don't touch the glory! Jesus is practically challenging His hearers to examine His teachings according to the Scriptures and He always attributed the results of His ministry to the work of the Father. Should any other Bible teacher do anything less?

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We've spent a lot of time on this subject and I know I have talked quite a bit about this topic, especially as we've gone through John's Gospel, but there's an important reason for this: it's only God's truth that satisfies! Are you seeking clarity in your life, or guidance? Do you need the confidence to move forward into an scary future? This is the secret; the answer to all your questions. The key to a brighter future is to be found in a willingness to obey God and faithfully follow in the direction that true doctrine leads; even before we know what it is!

We can be confident of the truth of God's will even if it seems strange to us. In fact, it's almost guaranteed to seem strange to us because God Himself tells us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" ([Isa 55:8](#)). Pick any subject, it doesn't matter how much or how little you know about that subject but that God sees it from a different perspective, a more comprehensive perspective. Thus, while His ways may seem strange to us, we can still obey them because we have the assurance that his way is the much better way, if for no other reason than that He can see the end from the beginning. If you knew how everything would work out in the end, you would live your life differently, right? Well, God does know how it's all going to end and He already has His plan laid out for each of our lives to advance His kingdom and glorify His name, but only if we have the good sense to obey. Do we? 😊